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TABUK AIR BASE - SAUDI ARABIA

--Military installations at Tabuk have existed since prior to World War II.

--Tabuk is the only significant military installation in the northwest portion of Saudi Arabia and sits astride a traditional invasion route used by both the Turks and the Egyptians.

--The present Saudi air base at Tabuk is an expansion of the civilian airport which has been in use since the early 1960's.

--The bulk of the Saudi fighter force--both the F-5's and Lightnings--has been traditionally stationed at Dhahran, to protect the oil fields; at Taif, to protect the Jidda-Mecca-Medina complex; and the Khamis Mushait, to protect the border with PDRY.

--In 1976 a portion of the Saudi Lightning interceptor forces was stationed at Tabuk.

--Improvement at Tabuk is part of an overall military modernization program which calls for a dispersal of air and ground units throughout the Kingdom.

--There has been no further construction at the Tabuk Air Base since 1974 when a British contractor completed additional facilities and a runway.

--The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are managing a family housing and community facilities construction project at Tabuk. There are plans for the Corps to assist in construction of an airborne school facility.

--We have no evidence the Saudis are focusing a military build-up on their northwestern frontier.

--It is our understanding that the Saudis plan to station the F-15's at Dhahran and Taif, and in the Riyadh area.

--The Saudis have indicated they do not intend to station the F-15's at Tabuk.

--The F-15 could not be assigned to Tabuk as a main operating base unless significant modifications and improvements were made in the base infrastructure. These changes would include new hangars, technical workshops, spare parts storage--all of which would have to be built to American standards specifically designed for the F-15.

TABUK AIR BASE - SAUDI ARABIA

Military installations have existed at Tabuk since before World War II.

The present Saudi air base at Tabuk represents an expansion of the civilian airport which has been used by Saudia, the Saudi Arabian airline since the early 1960s. For some time prior to 1974, it had been used for occasional flights by the Saudi Air Force which maintained a few ground facilities to support such flights. In 1974 the British firm Lang-Wimpey constructed additional facilities at Tabuk and an additional runway. In 1976 a portion of the Saudi Lightning Interceptor Force was stationed at Tabuk.

In addition to infantry elements, Tabuk houses the French armor school, the airborne school, a basic training center and air defense units. The presence of this large number of school and training units, plus dependents confirms the defensive character of the base. The facility at Tabuk is part of the overall Saudi military modernization program which among other things calls for a dispersal of Saudi air and ground units throughout the Kingdom's territory to provide defense of various key locations and strategic routes into Saudi Arabia.

In addition the Saudi Air Force detachment at Tabuk provides necessary and associated services including search and rescue operations, the operation of a weather station and air traffic control. All Saudi military elements at Tabuk provide additionally security and assistance to pilgrims travelling the highway through Tabuk to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Saudi Arabia, like all sovereign nations, has a legitimate requirement to protect all of its borders. This fact alone would dictate the establishment of a military facility somewhere in the northwest quadrant of the Kingdom, just as air bases have been built at Khamis Mushait in the south, Dhahran in the east, and at other strategic locations throughout the Kingdom. Beyond that, however, there are important historical, geographical, and religious considerations for the existence of the Tabuk base. Tabuk sits astride a traditional invasion route used by both Turks and Egyptians in past centuries. The installation is close to Egypt with whom Saudi Arabia had poor relations for most of the 1960s, particularly during Egypt's military intervention in the Yemen Civil War. Tabuk covers one of the few overland routes from Saudi Arabia to the Near East, an important consideration for a nation whose underdevelopment has in great measure been caused by

its geographic isolation. Tabuk's security and assistance role vis-a-vis the pilgrimage traffic assumes considerable importance in light of the strongly religious character of Saudi society, in general, and the seriousness with which Saudi monarchs have taken their responsibilities as the "Defender of the Holy Places."

The Corps of Engineers has not done, nor has it been asked to do, any work on the Tabuk air base. The Corps' projects in Tabuk have included a ground force garrison, including barracks, which was finished in 1972. The Corps is now building at Tabuk additional family housing units for dependents of Saudi ground force personnel. There is also a plan to construct an airborne school facility at Tabuk with Corps assistance.